



ATTRACTORS
THE INFO-LETTER OF THE
HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS INSTITUTE
VOLUME 4.2
FEBRUARY 2007

Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics. In this month's edition, Glenda Eoyang reflects on

CHANGE IS CHANGING

We all acknowledge the need to change more and faster than ever before, but at some point, farther and faster becomes more than a difference in degree. It becomes a difference in kind. We are coping with change that is different in kind from the changes that we've seen come and go in the past. We need different tools of thought and action to respond to this brave new world of change at the edge of chaos.

A corporate client is stretching to meet Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAGs). New product development, acquisitions, unbelievable expectations for corporate infrastructure, new business development challenges push the limits of traditional, equilibrium-based change initiatives. It is not enough for this organization to think about "unfreezing and refreezing." Even Kotter's Eight-Stage Process only helps them begin the change journey. Before long, they are lost, again, in the uncharted territory of massive, rapid, global, and unpredictable change.

Human systems dynamics offers no simple solution.

Each environment is unique and requires its own combination of stability and disruption. Every community responds to its own pace of individual and collective transformation.

History counts—the number and frequency of change efforts and their tradition of success or failure influences the effectiveness of change initiatives to come.

Individual change, team transformation, and community reawakening are all massively entangled. Sometimes one is prior in importance or sequence. With even a small change in circumstances, another might jump to the top of the list.

The assets of the human system determine, to a great extent, what change efforts will succeed and which will fail. So, because assets differ across groups, so do effective strategies for change.

Every situation is unique. Each change process is intimately related to the complex history and conditions of a single locale at a singular point in time.

There is no recipe for success in this new world of complex, chaotic change. But, there is hope. There is **adaptive capacity** that allows a human system to explore its options, make its choices, and learn its lessons well.

Adaptive capacity—as studied, practiced, and taught in human systems dynamics—is a discipline of inquiry that helps change agents see and influence the paths of transformation in their own, unique environments.

There are no simple answers, but there are some powerful questions that support the adaptive process. Here are some we've found to be useful:

- Who are we? How are we different than we used to be?
- What are we trying to accomplish?
- What makes us different from others?
- What makes us different from each other?
- How do we connect with each other most effectively?
- Where and how might we move more quickly?
- Where and how should we move more slowly?
- Where are we now? Where do we want to be?
- What do we notice as emerging patterns in a noisy environment?
- What are our options for action?
- Where and how do we fit?
- How often should we plan to plan again?
- How will we know when we've succeeded?
- What will we do when we fail?
- How can we commit to a path of action and still keep our eyes open for emerging possibilities?

Over the coming months, the HSD Institute will sponsor a series of events to explore and share the opportunities for adaptive action in response to these and other emerging questions.

On April 4, the Organization Development Network of Ottawa-Outaouais (ODNOO) will co-host a webinar called **Complex Change: A Dozen Differences**. During this free, hour-long webinar, we'll explore how change of tomorrow is different from change of the past. For more information, visit www.uliveandlearn.com.

On June 7 and 8, HSD Institute will again partner with ODNOO to host **Adaptive Action: Sustainable Change in Chaotic Times**. This two-day seminar promises to be an exciting, useful introduction to supporting change of the future. For more information or to register visit www.odnoo.org.

Search Institute (the home of the 40 Developmental Assets for Youth) is joining with HSD Institute to sponsor **Seeing and Leading Differently: Asset Building and Complex Change**. This is a series of four webinars that introduce tools and techniques for supporting complex change in communities. Topics will include *The Landscape Diagram* (4/17), *Self-Organizing Change* (6/19), *Planning in the Midst of Chaos* (8/21), and *Sustainability* (10/16). To find out more or to register for these low-cost seminars, visit www.search-institute.org/catalog/product.php?productid=16481

We would like to hear about your experience with unpredictable and rapid change. If you have stories, thoughts, or questions to share, please send a note to Julia Wolter (info@hsdinstitute.org). In the meantime, enjoy the opportunities and surprises of complex adaptation!

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